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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly Priority Theme: Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies

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The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Addressing the rising inequalities that exist within and among countries is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. This growing gap challenges social inclusion and must be overcome through fiscal, wage and social protection policies in order to uphold the inherent and inalienable dignity of all human beings. The growing disparities between access, opportunity, wealth and gender is of major concern. The United Nations and member states must step up to their commitments and efforts to eliminate the inequalities that are exacerbating extreme poverty. There must be a shift towards integral human development, a model that works towards combating inequality through the inclusion of every individual of society in its social, political, and economic policies.

Inequalities across social, economic and environmental pillars leave people living in poverty stigmatized, marginalized, and excluded from society, and is an urgent human rights concern. Their right to development is hindered and achieving progress is slow, if not stagnant. In order to lift people out of extreme poverty and work towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particular attention must be devoted to universal social protection so that no one is left behind. Social protection policies, including social protection floors are essential for social inclusion and must be integrated.

According to data presented in the World Social Protection Report 2017/19, only 45 per cent of the global population is effectively covered by at least one social benefit, leaving four billion people unprotected. Findings by the ILO World Social Protection Report show that within this:

- Only 35 percent of children worldwide have access to social protection.
- Only 41 percent of new mothers receive a maternity benefit.
- Only 68 percent of people above retirement age receive old-age pension.
- Only 44 percent of the world population have access to health coverage.

Implementing National Floors of Social Protection (ILO Recommendation 202) is an essential, action-oriented policy that ensures governments uphold their primary responsibility to provide basic social protection to their citizens. In order to be sustainable, these social protection services must be universal, and inclusive of all people, ensuring the fulfillment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural human rights. Access to health care, education and basic income security is essential in lifting those below the poverty line.

Girls and women face disadvantages which cause them to be overlooked and often excluded from this model. These gender disparities must be addressed specifically. We need to empower girls and women through social development floors that recognize their specific needs. Policies need to be implemented to support girls and women who are subject to inequalities within the labour market and political arenas. It is imperative that all segments of the population are reached effectively, and efficiently so social protection policies maximize the opportunity for everyone to be included in society.

Social protection contributes to and enhances the dignity and wellbeing of persons and families. When the basic needs of peoples for a place to live, nourishing food, health, education and basic income are provided, this in turn develops personal potential, and contributes to the development of communities and society. We must prioritize these social protection floors and pledge to implement them in order to ensure the dignity of all persons.

To achieve social inclusion, increased effectiveness of fiscal policies is pivotal. Within developing countries, an effective and reformed taxation system can ensure that fiscal policies are focused on implementing basic social services such as healthcare, education and wage benefits in order to cater to those most disadvantaged.

Research shows that Social Protection Floors for all are financially and fiscally possible in most countries. What is required for their successful implementation is the political will of developing countries to allocate resources within the budget. As outlined in the 2018 Financing the End of Extreme Poverty report, developed countries receive ten time more aid per person than those in less developed countries. Donor states need to commit to redistributing their aid and funding, targeting it to those countries that need it most so that no one is left behind.

To ensure all member states have the resources to implement ILO Recommendation 202, reform of the current financial system is critical. The present system is is exacerbating inequalities and threatening social inclusion.

Accountability and transparency are essential so that social protection strategies can function efficiently, and corruption is avoided. This will ensure strong and more involved state-society relationships develop, allowing citizens to be involved and voice specific social issues that forcing them below the poverty margin and excluded from social protection and society.

We recommend the following strategies:

- That the UN and Member States intensify efforts to reduce inequalities and eliminate extreme poverty
- Implement national floors of social protection in line with ILO R.202 and commit to allocating the necessary resources in national budgets.
- Reform the present financial architecture to reduce inequalities and put the dignity and life of people before corporate benefits.
- Ensure transparency and accountability in the implementation of social protection and the resources committed.

We foresee that these strategies would be efficient and effective in tackling the growing inequalities of social inclusion within and among countries while working towards overcoming extreme poverty. We must work together at a global level strategically and intelligently to strive for universal justice so that social inclusion barriers are eliminated from society and equality is achieved for all.